

Forensics hangs on in Farmington schools

By Casey Hana
staff writer

Coached at two of three high schools in Farmington are tugging it out to keep after-hours forensics programs going, helping students develop speaking skills and self-confidence.

At Harrison High, third-year coach Linda Hanson handled only six students this year, while forensics coaching veteran Gina VanHorn at Farmington High finished her 18th year with a group of 12-20 students.

A once-active forensics program for North Farmington appears to be defunct.

DESPITE NO set district budget and what coaches believe is weak support, the two active programs sent students to state competition this spring, with three from Harrison and five from Farmington High competing.

Farmington senior Colin Earles

placed fifth in the state for impromptu speaking, while Harrison sophomore Ellen Goldstein made it to state semifinals in the broadcasting competition.

"It's really underrated," VanHorn said. "I think academic competition should be highlighted. It's molding their (the students') future."

MUCH OF the problem, according to both coaches, is that students, school administrators and the general public don't know what "forensics" is.

The academic speaking competition involves 14 categories, including storytelling, public address and persuasive speaking, in which students compete using skills they have developed.

In Farmington schools, forensics is an extracurricular, done strictly after school hours. In some other districts, it is integrated into the curriculum where classes in forensics are offered.

Hanson, a 1981 Harrison graduate, became involved in coaching because of her interest in forensics while a student there.

The program helped "my confidence, my self-esteem a great deal," she said. "That was the biggest thing with me."

IN ADDITION to Goldstein, Harrison seniors Jennifer Church and Erica Watnick also competed at state. From Farmington High, in addition to Earles, sophomore Candice Enerio, junior Roopa Kadiwala, sophomore Ashish Panchal and senior Lauren Weary all competed.

English departments at both high schools help the programs along, by letting coaches come into classes in the fall and promote the forensics program, which begins winter semester.

"Once they're hooked, they fall in love with it," Hanson said.

CHURCH GOT involved with the program "on a whim," she said.

"It's been a lot of fun. We know more about what's going on. I speak better in front of people."

Watnick believes her experience in forensics will help her with college and a career.

"Since middle school, I've always been involved in public speaking. I think I like this better than drama — it's all personal."

BOTH COACHES said they plan to

continue their programs next year, and hope to generate additional student interest and community support for their programs.

"I was really tempted to give it up this year," VanHorn said, "but you look out and see those faces and they're so eager."

They would like to see more monetary support for the program, as well. Students now must supplement any financing with candy sales and dances.

"When was the last time football players had to sell M & Ms for their uniforms?" Van Horn said.



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Harrison forensics students (from left) Jennifer Church, Erica Watnick and Ellen Goldstein compare notes.

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